

Am I the only, only believer?

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Summary:

“Besides,” he said with a small smile, backing away, giving Eddie room to breathe even as Eddie wanted to tell him to stay, “it was clearly aliens.”

“There’s no such thing as aliens.”

He raised an eyebrow at Eddie, “but there are ghosts?”

buzzfeed unsolved au

1. True Crime: The Disappearance of Alvin Marsh

Notes for the Chapter:

Ben is the camera man and editor, self taught. Was college roommates with Eddie at Boston University where he majored in anthropology. The token straight man.

Eddie is co host of Richie's latest idea that worked for once? Originally a psychology major, then a pre-med before finally settling on archeology. Lives to argue with Richie, his friend since childhood.

Richie is the co host of their youtube series. Helps Ben edit but usually ends up making things worse. Followed Eddie to Boston where he attended UMass Boston as a physics major because he didn't really know what to major in. Would have gone to Tufts or MIT if he had the money for that.

This had all been Richie's idea to begin with.

Maybe Eddie could have stopped him. Maybe he should have *stopped* him, but it was too funny to watch Richie jump at every audio clip claiming to have caught a ghost on tape. Especially when he was high.

So that's how after graduation Richie had propositioned both Eddie and Eddie's roommate Ben, and by then, their good friend, to make some dumb ghost hunting and crime videos. They had uploaded them to youtube after lots of cheap beer as they moved into their latest shitty apartment that Eddie was convinced was where he'd catch some strange fungal disease and end up a story on the discovery channel, and fallen asleep after god knows how many rounds of cards against humanity.

A week later, Richie had burst in, still in his Pizza Hut uniform, yelling about their youtube views. It had just been ten thousand views then.

So they continued to make videos of local haunted houses and famous crimes with Ben as their camera man and film editor, self taught. What a guy.

And that had been that.

"No offense dipshit but what makes you think we should go skulking around a dead dude's house? We might end up dead!"

Richie rolled his eyes, barely visible from under his long curls, "he's technically missing, but like come on babe, it'll be fun."

That's how it always went. Richie dropping by, looking frazzled and slightly high, curls wild, as he dragged Eddie into his latest idea.

"No thanks. Go get yourself killed, but don't come crying to me and haunting me after."

Richie scoffed, "there's no such thing as ghosts Eddiebeth."

"Then how come you screamed like a little girl at-"

"That's sexist."

"Not the point!"

"Fuck off."

"Besides," he said, looking over at Ben for support, "I doubt Ben wants to go spend a few days in bum fuck Delaware. Is that even really a state? Have you ever met anyone from Delaware?"

Ben shrank down into the latest in a long line of desk chairs Richie had broken from spinning until he fell on the floor, dizzy. "I mean, there have been lots of comments asking for us to go to other places? And we've exhausted Boston by now."

"Traitor," Eddie spits stalking over to the kitchen for the angel cake he had bought from Whole Foods at a price that had been daylight robbery. The container was still there, along with the frosting smeared onto the sides.

“Richie what the fuck have I told you about eating my food!”

*

So that's how he, Eddie, an unemployed overqualified millennial found himself in the back seat driving to Delaware.

“Please play something other than Fergie for fucks sake,” he grumbled, phone having died leaving New York. It was the new iPhone update, the stupid iPhone without an outlet for headphones. He just knew it. “You also said you'd switch seats with me during the last rest stop.”

“I thought you didn't want to sit up front,” Richie said, sucking on a lollipop, feet on the dashboard. The disrespect.

“That was only because you wouldn't stop kicking my seat.” Eddie still wasn't sure how they'd lasted as friends for this long.

“Eds-“

“Don't call me that.”

“Shut the hell up or I'm putting NPR for the rest of the drive,” Ben threatened, finally reaching his snapping point after having spent four hours locked in the car listening to them squabble.

“Do you see how he's antagonizing me Ben,” he cried outraged, “Get mad at him!”

“You need to learn to take responsibility for yourself Eds my dear,” Richie said, leaning over to the back seat, and grinning like a smug cat.

Eddie yanked the lollipop right from Richie's hand and threw it out the window, a self satisfied smile on his lips.

“Oh Eds my man,” he said as he took another lollipop out of his pocket and started to suck on it.

Eddie fumed in outrage all the way to the middle of nowhere Delaware.

At least Ben had started to play something else, Harry Styles' new album, a welcome change from the unending mix of Ke\$ha and Korn Richie insisted on playing.

*

The building where Alvin Marsh had disappeared twelve years ago, looked ordinary and dilapidated. The paint was peeling. Eddie wasn't sure whether the color had originally been white or yellow.

Ben had checked them all into a local bed and breakfast on the main street in the town. He'd been smart and nabbed the single room while Eddie and Richie attempted to tilt the vending machine and get the bag of chips that had gotten stuck inside out. That left Eddie and Richie to room together.

Not that they didn't have years of experience on this.

Richie had spent countless nights at Eddie's house growing up, sneaking in through the window and sneaking out in the morning just to go knock on Eddie's door and come on in like he hadn't just spent all night there.

That had been all Eddie.

He wasn't sure what his mother would have done if she'd known how often the boy slept next to Eddie, snoring and kicking in his sleep.

Ben was busy checking the lighting around the place, seeing if they could just use the natural light or if they'd have to jury rig some artificial light using the car headlights, again.

Meanwhile, Richie was taking selfies, "So the ladies know I haven't been killed," he said, smiling up at Eddie from where the sun was hitting him perfectly, making his cheekbones sharper than usual, eyes twinkling with mischief.

How had *he* gotten a physics degree again? Of all people?

"I thought you said this was a disappearance Richie," Eddie hissed, "I told you people don't just go missing? This isn't some dumb sci-fi show, the killer could still be around and watching! Jesus christ what

if they kill us for sticking our noses where they don't belong!" He was hyperventilating again, breaths coming out short and shallow, he couldn't breathe. He needed his inhaler!

The whole world started spinning right under his feet.

"Shh, babe I've got you," Richie whispered, serious for once. He clutched Eddie in a light embrace until his breathing returned to normal. Until he didn't feel like he was gasping for air. "Besides," he said with a small smile, backing away, giving Eddie room to breathe even as Eddie wanted to tell him to stay, "it was clearly aliens."

"There's no such thing as aliens."

He raised an eyebrow at Eddie, "but there are ghosts?"

"Aliens are more plausible," Ben said, appearing back from the side of the building, grass overgrown with weeds, "their existence I mean, not that they took Alvin Marsh."

Eddie tilted his head back, "Why do you have to test me like this god?"

*

The facts were these.

In the summer of 2005, Mr. Marsh had left his work at the factory that had since then shut down. He stopped by a local diner to buy his usual: a grilled cheese, a chicken breast sandwich with extra mayo, and two sides of fries. Then he went home like he always did, except on Sundays since they were his day off. Alvin Marsh turned on the tv, ate his sandwich and fries, leaving the rest on the kitchen counter and then disappeared.

No one could explain it.

His car and keys were still there. There was nothing missing from the scene. No sign of forced entry or a struggle. He simple went into his apartment and never walked back out.

The police couldn't make head or tails of it even as they interviewed

the neighbors, coworkers, and family. The man wasn't notable. He worked and ate and slept. While the people had nothing good to say about him, there was nothing bad either. No skeletons uncovered.

Sure he drank a little too much sometimes, got into a bar fight once in a while, but apparently that was common in this town.

Oh and then there were the rumors that he had beat his wife. But-

His wife had left him four years before, moving to Portland with her sister. There had been no divorce, she had simple up'd and left. Even in the interviews, she hadn't said anything about abuse.

Still, it incited a gut feeling in Eddie.

The daughter had been twelve at the time. Beverly Marsh. She had spent the day at her friends house, only finding her dad missing once she had been driven home. The girl had been scared as tears fell from her eyes according to witnesses.

He knew from the reports Ben had dug up that it was said that the daughter was bullied at school, had only one friend, but it had nothing to do with Mr. Marsh's disappearance.

She would be their age now.

The case had caught the imagination of the whole east coast for a month back in 2005, before it had been buried by other news.

Ben and Richie had been drawn to it by some late night show on tv when they'd both been high.

*

Over the next two days they filmed their usual episode with the addition of the place they were talking about in the background. Someone had yelled at them, making Richie jump a foot in the air, thinking it was the murderer.

For someone who claimed to be scared of nothing, pretty much everything made Richie jump and scream.

They even ate at the diner that Alvin Marsh had frequented back in the day. “I’m surprised they haven’t closed it,” he had muttered, looking around at the place. It was full of the sort of memorabilia that belonged in a garage sale, decorated with puzzles on the walls. Not to mention the amount of dust that lifted overtime he touched anything. It was just crawling with disease.

“Careful Eddiebeth, might catch E.coli.”

“That’s not something to joke about,” he hissed, “plenty of people die from that, haven’t you ever watched Food inc. The FDA is in shambles.” He hadn’t been able to eat for a week after watching the documentary in high school.

“Yeah dumbass, we watched it in health. Got yelled at for sleeping right through it.”

“Well it smells pretty good,” Ben added, “much better than all the food from the gas stops.”

Richie went with the chicken breast sandwich, of course he had. Ben opted for the steak and eggs, over easy, the heathen. Eddie ordered the soup of the day, vegetable. The food was decent, nothing to brag about, but then that’s not why they were really here.

“Are you guys here about Marsh,” their waitress asked them as she refilled their sodas. She had a nose a bit squished like a pugs, but she would have been pretty had it not been for the bitchy look to her features, twisted in annoyance.

Ben as always was willing to give her the benefit of the doubt, “yeah, it’s sort of our job. Why? Do you know anything?”

She ignored him. Eddie cursed whoever ran this place and didn’t have their employees wear name tags. Pinning her eyes on Richie she asked, “are those glasses supposed to be ironic or something?”

“Well, I wear glasses anyway so I thought I might as well be hipster trash,” he grinned lazily back at her. And he was in his awful thrifted Hawaiian shirts, ripped jeans, and duck taped vans. “Why? Want to see what I look like without glasses?”

He even winked.

“It’s like watching a train wreck, I just can’t look away,” Ben muttered to Eddie, who almost choked on his lemonade. He would never drink water at restaurants because it was usually tap water and who knows what was in tap water.

She scoffed, “not even in your dreams nerd.”

“Didn’t know it was still 1989, oh,” Richie raised his hand for a high five, which Ben reluctantly gave him.

“Fuck off Greta,” said a woman who had just walked in, “no one here likes you, so just leave them alone.”

“Skank.”

“Bitch.”

Greta walked away. Eddie was sure not to order anymore food or soda least she spit in it or worse.

“Hey Ben,” the newcomer said, sliding in next to Ben. She had short bright red hair, the color of strawberries in the summer, freckles dotting her creamy skin, and denim overall shorts over a white t shirt that was splattered with paint. She was beautiful.

“Hi Beverly,” Ben said, blushing light pink.

Eddie’s blood rushed to his ears as he heard Beverly. Surely this wasn’t-

“Beverly Marsh,” cried Richie before Ben could kick him under the table.

“Well, it’s Beverly Uris now,” she said, smile not faltering for a second. “Mr. Uris adopted me after my mom and him talked and she gave up custody. No like she hadn’t already left.”

“Richie,” Ben hissed.

“It’s okay,” she said, “everyone here knows, which is why I hate

visiting but what can you do when it's family," she shrugged, nose crinkling. God she was adorable. No wonder Ben was blushing.

They left after Ben paid, walking around a bit until they grabbed ice cream and eventually she had to run, "it was nice meeting you, ben talks a lot about you both," and then she left.

No one had brought up her missing father again.

*

"No girl can be good enough to risk getting murdered," Riche had said as they got back and started editing, seeing what they still needed. "There's lots of fish in the sea my man, I've got some hot chicks-"

"No you don't Richie," Ben said, "you're gay for one and it's not like that. She'd never-

"Her tits are blinding you. Don't let her womanly wiles distract you."

"What the hell are womanly wiles Richie," Eddie had retorted.

"How the fuck am I supposed to know," he replied as he channel surfed, not bothering to take his shoes off as he laid on Eddie's bed, "I like dick, remember."

The theories were these.

Alvin Marsh had been about to lose his job because he was getting old and the factory had wanted to fire him to avoid paying him retirement, so he had faked his death and cashed in his life insurance. The only problem was that his life insurance had been cashed by his wife.

The second theory went with the idea he had beat his wife. So she had hired someone to kill Alvin, make him disappear and then cash in the life insurance. That way she had an alibi, being in Portland, while her husband was disappeared. But there was no sign of a fight or forced entry.

The third theory was that Beverly Marsh had killed her father along

with her friend Stan Uris. They had then disposed of the body, and had gone back to the Stan's home before being missed in order to have an alibi. They would have been able to get into the apartment without force, and put everything back together like it had been. Beverly would have been the only person who could have known where things belonged.

The problem was of course she had no motive. She and her friend had both been kids at the time, and how had they not been seen? How would they have been able to take on a grown man?

And so the case remained unsolved.

*

“I think it was the daughter.”

“You just don’t like her.”

“The cameraman stays quiet Ben,” Richie sneered, “the cameraman is a ghost. Never there. Besides, its always the family or someone close to the victim.”

He gazed into the camera, “so if I ever go missing you know to start with Eddie.”

“Why me!”

“You’ve stated on multiple times you want to strangle me,” he says grinning at Eddie, “and sometimes you get this look. . .”

“Okay but you like ate all my ice cream and stole my razor.”

“Borrowed.”

“I am not using a razor you used.”

“You didn’t mind when I used your toothbrush.”

Eddie huffs in outrage, “What the fuck Richie, this is why I didn’t want to share an apartment with you. There are boundaries!”

“Guys,” Ben snapped, getting them back on track.

He cleared his throat before continuing. “But what would have been the motive,” Eddie asked, looking over at Richie. “I mean maybe if it was true he beat his wife then maybe he beat his daughter, that would be a motive, but how does a girl kill and get rid of a grown man?”

“I don’t know,” shrugged Richie, “but kids can be monsters. And surprisingly strong. I mean there are kids who kill.”

“I know that,” he snapped, “I’m just not buying it.”

“Well, what do *you* think happened then? Ghosts?”

“I think it was the wife you dumbass. There’s motive and she wouldn’t have told the police about the abuse to cover her own tracks.”

Richie rolled his eyes, “where do you even hire a killer? Like where is this directory? Do you place an ad on reddit and wait for a response?”

Eddie shrugged, “I’m sure there’s ways of finding hired guns. Like you can find anything on the internet these days, so why is an assassin so far fetched?”

“I think an assassin is a little to high class for this job,” Richie replied, “like there’s hookers, and then theres escorts, you know?”

“You don’t even know.”

“Fuck off.”

“Well,” he said looking into the lens again, “I think this means this case remains unsolved.”

Ben gave them two thumbs up and stopped the recording.

“You don’t really think she did it,” Ben said, looking at Richie.

“Yeah I fucking do. Why? You want to fuck her and marry her and have lots of redhead babies?”

“Richie,” Eddie hissed, hitting him in the arm.

He yelled, “how the hell are you so strong Eds, you’re a twig.”

“I don’t know, we’ve been talking and I really like her and I think she likes me. She went to UCLA for creative writing, wants to be a poet but is also into writing screenplays. She’s even been published once or twice. She liked my poetry.”

“Or she’s using you.”

Ben glared at Richie, “I don’t care if she did or didn’t do it. I like her a lot and I trust that she had her reasons if she even did it.”

Eddie raised his eyebrows, “how are you still so pure in this sinful world?”

“Fuck off both of you,” he said closing his computer, “I’m going to bed.”

“Night BenBen,” Richie called out.

“Get off of my bed.”

“Make me.”

Richie squirmed as Eddie let himself fall onto of the other man’s body jabbing his elbows into his back. Trying to shove him off the bed.

“Dick.”

“Your mom wasn’t complaining last night when I-“

“Oh my god! Shut the fuck up!”

He scooted over so there was enough room for both of them on the twin bed and they fell asleep to Bob’s burgers playing silently in the dark room.

*

2005

What had happened that summer, the day Alvin Marsh had gone missing was something that Beverly Marsh and Stan Uris would take to their graves.

They had been so careful. Gone over their story a thousand times. They had been so scared when the story had blown up in the media.

It was a relief when everyone moved on.

Beverly had gone to spend the day with Stan as she usually did in the summer, waiting for her dad to leave before daring to come out from behind her locked door.

They had spent the morning sitting on a blanket. Stan had his binoculars out along with his bird guidebook as Beverly doodled in her journal, filling its pages with all the words she wanted to say, but didn't.

They had been fooling around, balancing on rocks, when Beverly had fallen into the brackish lake, its water source, the sewer. That meant she needed to change.

"I could just let you borrow my clothes," Stan had offered. But they both knew that wouldn't work. Donald Uris would notice and wonder why Beverly didn't just go home and change.

Beverly was practiced by then a keeping secrets. She had watched from the bed as her mother had carefully hidden the bruises she always seemed to get from the fights that always happened late at night, when her name would be flung like an accusation between her parents. She had learned never to mention any of it in public. Too always do what her mother told her to.

Running to her room and locking it when her mother told her too, not waiting for her father to-

There had been good times too. Or times like these with Stan. When her mother was still around. They would go out from the moment her daddy left till after they were sure he was asleep on the couch.

There would always be fights if Alvin woke up to see them sneak in.

"It's fine," Beverley told Stan, "I'll just go change."

"I'll go with you."

"Are you sure? I'm sure the birds would probably come out more if there didn't hear me read poems out load all morning."

He shook his head, "it's nearly noon, late for bird watching."

So they had gone to Bev's home only to find Alvin already there. Stan had waited outside, careful not to be seen from the windows or door.

He had yelled and grabbed Beverly's arm, squeezing so hard she was sure to have a bruise there later. She tried to get away, trying to kicking him away, but that only served to trap her under him. Her daddy pinned her to the floor. Hot tears streamed down her face as she sobbed.

"Daddy."

She tried talking to him. "It was an accident daddy. Daddy I wasn't doing anything wrong. I promise. Daddy let's just eat, wouldn't you like that?"

But he wasn't listening. Calling her the same names Greta so often did at school. "And with that jew," he spit.

Beverly sobbed, trying to reach for anything she could use as a weapon.

When she thought about it later, she'd realized how close she had been to getting raped. And by her own father, the person that was supposed to protect her. She had spent so many nights crying about it later. Feeling confused by how much she missed her daddy even as terrible and abusive as he had been.

Her hand found a hammer, probably her daddy's, and without thinking, she brought it down hard against his skull. His eyes rolled back, body going limp. She hit him again, and again.

Stan came in running, finding her crying over Alvin Marsh's still warm corpse. He had grown so pale she was afraid he'd pass out,

afraid he'd leave her here alone with the body.

After a moment, Stan had simply said, "We need to get rid of the body."

Beverly had nodded, unable to speak from the shock. She placed the hammer back in the toolbox and helped Stan.

They had checked to see if anyone was watching before dragging the body out and down by the sewer water out back, stepping the water to avoid making any foot prints. They had kept going until they reached a place where the sewer water collected into a pond deep enough to hide a body in. Stan had vomited from the smell.

Water so putrid that it was brown and yellow and had a sheen of oil. They had tossed the body in there along with their clothes and then went back the way they had come.

Beverly got a change of clothes, letting Stan borrow sweats and then they'd snuck into Stan's house as if they'd never left.

It was a small miracle that his parents had both thought they'd been there the entire time.

That night, after Mr. Uris had made a scandal down at the station so that Beverly could stay with them while the authorities contacted her mother in Portland, she had held Stan's hand and cried herself to sleep.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled to Stan. *Sorry for dragging you into this when you've only ever been a good friend, my only friend.*

"He deserved it," Stan had whispered back in the dark of the room.

They had never talked about it again.

Not even after she had become his official sister.

And she was glad to put it all behind her.

2. but i don't ever want to see you with him

Summary for the Chapter:

an interlude between episodes. Beverly goes to visit her boyfriend and brings her close friend and adopted brother along with her.

“Sorry I’m late but the post office made a mess of my latest shipments and I was this close to losing it. This is exactly why the U.S. postal service is going out of business,” Beverly says, thankful that Stan had cleaned her smudged screen the last time he was over. She never cleaned her screen until even with the brightness all the way up, she couldn’t see past the dirt and smudges.

“So I take it your business is going well?” Ben is wearing a hoodie from Boston U, his desk is a mess of papers and camera equipment. Stan would go crazy at the disorganization.

“Yeah, can’t complain. Although Andy keeps wanting me to go out and find a stable job like Stan, but like, I’m a creative writer so like there’s no such thing as a stable job, y’know.” Which is exactly why Andy and Don Uris had asked her a thousand times if she was sure she wanted to be a creative writer and not an accountant or something that ensured employment after graduating.

“That’s the main reason I didn’t major in english,” Ben says from his own room in Boston. Skype calls were a godsend. They had been seeing each other, or rather they had been skyping each other since he’d been down in her home town. He was cute. Beverly got so giddy when she talked to him, like she was young and just learning what crushes were all over again.

“I just figured I’d be up to my ass in debt, might as well get into debt for something I liked,” she replies, stretching out on her bed.

“Well, I can’t wait to see you in person,” he says. “If you’re still-“

“Of course I’m coming Ben. I like wouldn’t not want to see you in person. Stan’s throwing a bitch fit over putting that many miles on

his precious baby but he'll get over it.”

He laughs, an easy chuckle that reaches his eyes. The sunlight made his light hair appear golden. It was longer than when he'd been down here. Probably hadn't had a haircut since before then.

“I watched your guy's latest upload,” she says taking a bite from the french fries she had leftover from yesterday. They were awful by now, but she still ate them. “I didn't think Richie would get that freaked out, and by a door creaking.”

Ben smiles, “Richie's bark is louder than his bite.”

She hears Richie shout from the background, muffled by the quality of the stream. Ben shouts back, telling him to mind his own business. She really wishes she was there and not here.

“Listen, I'll call you back before he throws my knitting needles out the window.”

“You knit,” she says cooing, teasing, “You've got to make something for me.” She had tried to learn to knit once, but she didn't have the patience for it.

“I'll have it done when you get here,” he grins, before turning to yell at Richie some more. She sees Richie's stroll into Ben's room, glasses causing the worst lens flare on the screen.

“Right well, I'll see if I'm free later because I had a thing later. There's this like very 90s grrl band playing for a homeless LGBT fundraiser.”

“Cool,” Ben replies shoving Richie out of the way before ending the call.

*

“I can't believe you've convinced me to drive across the country with my brand new car.”

“You're the dumbass that bought a car,” she snipes back from where she's slowly sorting the latest clothes she's thrifted and uploading to

her shop. “We live in a city for crying out loud! What do you need a car for?”

Stan just glares at her from where he’s cleaning the kitchen, organizing the dishes she’s placed in the “wrong” place. She’s really tried to mimic his organization, make it easier for him, but she can never remember where everything goes.

“They called you a murderer on their show!”

“So you did watch it,” she accuses, making sure to grin with her teeth.

“Beverly,” he huffs, scrubbing harder than he needs to, knuckles turning white, “that’s not the point and you’re not a murderer, it was involuntary manslaughter at worse.”

“Only you would google that,” she said, pulling a dress that she might just keep over her t shirt boldly proclaiming the jewish summer camp Donald Uris had attended when he was a kid, more moth eaten than anything which just made it better.

“The distinction is important.” He gets up, pulling the white eco friendly gloves off his hands, wiping the sweat from his brow. “You will pay for the gas,” he says, an eyebrow furrowed.

“I’ll do you one better,” she says tossing him a cardigan she had found that just screamed *I iron my clothes* like an old man, “I’ll go out at four in the morning with you like a crazy person and bird watch.”

“What makes you think I want you to go bird watching with me?” Stan collapses on the cheap ikea couch by her, already having kicked off the flip fops he uses in the kitchen off. Technically they were a thousand year old Birkenstocks that Stan had gotten for his birthday back in high school. The most expensive gag gift she’d ever gotten him.

“Shut up,” she says, laughing.

*

Stan refuses to let Beverly drive through the night so the drive from

California to Boston takes way longer than it has too. It's peppered with stops at thrift stores along the way, "how is everything in here only one dollar!" There's the small diners in small towns because neither of them was willing to eat fast food for five days straight. "We are such a fucking stereotype Stanford." And Stanley yelling at her to drive below the speed limit. "There's no one around! This road only has two lanes for fucks sake, and not even like two on each side!"

Stan unironically uses the finger spinner that she had ironically given him for his nerves. "Despite what you think Bev," Stan mutters, "You're not a character in a Jane Austen book, specifically you're not Mr. Bennet."

"Don't ruin my fun," she says, making her best angry face.

"Watch the road Bev. I want to die but I am not dying in Iowa."

They get into Boston early in the morning. Bev had spent the whole night texting Ben, fallen asleep so late she can't keep her eyes open on her first views of Boston. It's fall, and cold, the leaves turning red and brown. She had missed fall when she'd lived in southern California.

Stan blares the black keys to wake her up.

"It's your boyfriend."

She nods, rubbing at her eyes, "get me a coffee first o brother of mine."

"Lots of cream and no sugar?"

"You know me so well."

*

Ben is waiting for them on the curbside, sitting in a parking space, waving away people trying to park where he is. "Parking is a nightmare on this street," he tells them both. "Richie and Eddie are still asleep, they were marathoning Rick and Morty." He wraps the promised scarf around her neck, the colors of fall, brown and red and a mustard yellow, before placing a soft kiss on her lips.

“They sound awful,” Stan says.

“Oh they are.” But his fond smile says he doesn’t really mean it.

Ben leads them into his building, apologizing for the lack of an elevator as he helps Bev and Stan carry their things up. Insisting on helping them even though it’s not that much. Stan takes his help without question as Beverly insists on carrying her bag up.

He even has pancakes made from scratch. She can smell them before Ben opens the door to their third floor flat. It’s not in too bad of an area according to Stan’s meticulous research.

“I’ve got some maple syrup and jam,” Ben says handing them plates. Stan carefully takes his shoes off, placing them by the doorway. He totally would’ve been a vulcan in Star Trek.

They eat in mostly silence. Beverly’s tired after almost five days on the road. Stan mostly stares out the window, tapping his fingers rhythmically against the table to the tune of bolero de ravel. It was a nervous tick of his.

The apartment was exactly what you’d expect from three guys still fresh from college. Small and cramped with all sorts of things tossed on the table and sofa, and empty pizza box with a take out container on top of the kitchen counter. It sort of freaked Beverly out too.

Even her dorm in college had never been this messy.

“You guys can take my room,” Ben offers.

“I’m not going to steal your bed,” she says, shaking her head.

“It’s no problem, seriously.”

Stan rolls his eyes, snapping out of his thoughts, “what are we twelve? I’ll take the couch.”

Ben blushes bright red, and Beverly can’t help but burst into giggles. It might just be the caffeine and days of sitting in a car without moving.

“So do you guys have any interesting cases planned?”

Ben shook his head, sipping his tea, “not right now. We’re just uploading what we have and doing q&a videos. We are planning our supernatural episodes. There’s this really cool haunting involving a jazz club and the civil rights movement in the south. Richie really wants to go stay in haunted houses like he’s not the first one out the door running.”

Stan snorts as Richie emerges from a room which Bev can only assume is his and Eddie’s shared room. “Fuck off Ben. I know you’re the one making the noises that sound trying to pass them off as ghosts.”

“Please,” Ben replies, “I’m the camera man. I’m solid. Never get spooked or let the camera shake.”

Richie rolls his eyes, “have you seen my glasses?”

“How should I know where they are? I went to sleep before you two. You probably fell asleep on them again.”

Richie shoved a cold slice of pizza into his mouth while looking Stan and her over, squinting because of his lack of glasses. “That’s not what your mom said last night.”

Beverly laughs, “seeing ben’s mom behind eddie’s mom’s back?”

“Cougars y’know.”

“Oh lord take me now,” Stan says in a monotone voice, finishing off his black coffee in one gulp.

“Aren’t you jewish? Wouldn’t it be like. . .” Richie trails off, obviously knowing nothing about judaism.

“You know styrofoam can give you cancer,” Eddie calls out, looking at Stan’s coffee cup. “And stop smoking weed in our room Richie, you know that fucks up my breathing. Do you want me to die?”

“Weed has never done anything to anyone, didn’t you watch *Adam Ruins Everything*? It even has like medical benefits now.”

“Everything has carcinogens these days,” Stan adds, leaning back against his chair, back ramrod straight. He was already tall and he refused to slouch.

“Right,” Eddie and Richie both say at the same time in two different tones. Richie grins as Eddie smacks his arm.

*

They spend their last night together going to karaoke, getting a small room for the five of them. By then, Stan has actually opened up, which usually takes a while for him. Otherwise, Bev is sure he would have been popular even with his OCD.

She has her fingers intertwined with Ben’s as Eddie and Richie coo and aw at them.

“Disgusting,” Stan says, grinning.

They all take the T to get there, not willing to walk through the late evening wind. Ben let’s them use his pass. Eddie almost misses the train while he’s trying to clean his sneaker by wiping it on the ground. Richie and Stan stand in the doors, not letting them close, ignoring the yells from other people, as they call out to him, making him run over and get in.

There’s nowhere to sit which means it’s just like riding the Bart.

Richie buys cheap beers and greasy food, a bunch of fries and mozzarella sticks and onion rings that remind Beverly of lots of late night study sessions with her favorite roommate and friend, Melissa. She was in grad school now, but had gone to visit Beverly last spring break.

Richie makes them sing Ke\$ha and Lady Gaga, which really are bangers. Her voice goes hoarse from yelling into the microphone. Eddie sings along despite protesting the choices in music.

They eventually sing bohemian rhapsody because its not really karaoke if they don’t and utterly butcher the song.

The couch is too small for the five of them so she ends up sitting in

Ben's lap, sharing one of the microphones.

A couple beers in and Stan is belting out Psycho Killer with his dad dance moves, making Richie almost choke on his drink. Eddie's actually spills on his shirt.

They're through two pitchers of cheap beer, belting out all the songs from high school musical, and watching Richie give Eddie a lap dance before they decide to walk home while winking at Stan.

They *really* should have piled into a cab.

All of them are plastered, leaning into each other in the frigid night air, still laughing. Beverly's clutching onto Ben as she laughs so hard her sides hurt, tears forming in her eyes.

"But you didn't break even once Stan The Man," Richie yells out into the night, "award winning performance."

"I just love being a twink," Stan replied, winking at Richie, before pushing his curls out of his face. They were damp with sweat from all they're singing and jumping because none of them could actually dance.

"In what world are you a twink!"

"I made Stan audition for a play with me and somehow he landed a lead role and I was—"

"The prettiest tree in all the forest," Stan added, bating his eyelashes, lips forming and exaggerated pout.

"There's only room for one twink in this squad!"

"Oh my god Richie shut up!"

"WE ARE NOT GETTING SQUAD TATTOOS!"

*

"You slept with Richie!"

“Don’t look at me with those judgmental eyes Beaverly,” Stan says, smoking a joint he’d probably stolen from Richie.

“He’s like in love with Eddie, for fuck’s sake! You don’t get in the middle of shit like that! It gets messy.”

“I know,” he says shrugging, “but it was just sex.”

“Don’t get spicy with me Stanford,” she says, taking the joint from his lips, going for a long drag, “sometimes I forget what a huge slut you are.”

“Don’t slut shame me,” he says, zipping up his North Face jacket over his Ralph Lauren oxford shirt. He had never really gotten past his Vampire Weekend phase, mistaking preppy for hipster chic. It did work for him. Whenever Beverly wore a dress shirt she just looked like she was on her way to a job interview.

“I’m not,” she protests, shoving the rest of her things into the car. She’d already said goodbye to Ben this morning. She hadn’t really wanted to leave the warmth of the bed, her arms around Ben, his soft chubby belly against her hands, cuddling in bed together.

“Aren’t you,” he sneers.

They hold their glares for as long as they can before crackling as they hop into his car and begin the long journey back home.

Notes for the Chapter:

i hate hate writing stan. i feel like i can't pin him down and he always ends up being out of character. idk idk. i did so much research, mainly google mapping things, so yeah. let me know how you liked this i guess. if i should continue or not. . .cool cool cool

i drop a clue about where richie and eddie will visit next so? guess maybe?

3. Supernatural: The Black Spot Hauntings

Eddie and Ben had called and arranged the stay to avoid anymore late night jail stays because of Richie and his insistence on breaking and entering for the people on youtube, insisting it gave their videos authenticity. Eddie thought Richie just wanted an excuse to break into an abandoned building.

Not that Eddie wanted to stay in any haunted building. He had pretty much complained the whole time they had planned their trip. The rest of their supernatural episodes, while still in haunted locations, weren't in an abandoned building full of rust and rot.

At least the last stay they'd been at, a haunted house where a wife had been locked up victorian era style, had been converted into a pretty nice hotel so it wasn't completely out of a horror movie, the kind Richie had always instead on watching only to spend the rest of the night curled under blankets.

Eddie was willing to do a lot for Richie, he really was, but a condemned building was too much.

"People have died everywhere," Richie called out from the bathroom, as if hearing his thoughts. He never shut the door no matter how many times Ben and Eddie yelled at him. "Probably in this apartment too Eddie bear."

"Shut up asshole," he snapped, before continuing to comfort his mother and placate her with updates on his latest tetanus shots and doctor's checkups. She had seen their latest romp in the hick town in Delaware and was not happy. Not that their town in Minnesota was much better. "Yes mommy, we were very careful. Made sure not to drink any tap water, so there's no need to get tested for lead."

"-I know I can't be touching grass, I'm allergic."

He rolled his eyes. It was tedious work, but it kept her from moving to Boston after him.

Richie made kiss-y faces at him, "love you too Mrs.K!"

He took that as a sign to end the call, promising not to let Richie talk him into anything else that might end with an infection or disease even as he had his bags packed for their latest romp, a haunted jazz club from the 1920s called the Black Spot.

“Can’t you ever fuck off,” Eddie snapped after hanging up. He had been so done with Richie lately.

Eddie had been in a bad mood ever since Richie had locked him out of *their* room, so he could sleep with Stan. He hadn’t even thought Richie and Stan liked each other, with Stan’s sarcastic comments and constant eye rolling. Not that it was any of his business, but he knew Richie was prone to making dumb choices and he was a good friend who just cared.

But that didn’t explain the gut wrenching feeling Eddie had gotten that morning, watching Stan slip out of their room thinking Eddie was still asleep.

Not that Eddie had anything against gay people. His best friend was gay. And Stan was really fun, especially after a few days when they’d all gotten to know each other, and he’d say the wittiest things with the straightest face. He was also a walking talking planet earth episode, which Ben usually watched when he couldn’t sleep.

He was also undeniably attractive, like Richie. Not that he was gay or liked men but if he did-

Eddie shook his head.

“Well who shoved a stick up your ass without prepping,” Richie said, trying to mask the hurt look on his face with his usual dirty humor.

“Just go load the car.”

“Why do I always have to load the car,” Richie grumbled, but went to start loading the car. It was September by now, so Boston had been filled with freshmen settling into all the universities around. It made Eddie feel old.

It also meant the start of flu season.

Ben just gave Eddie a strange look from where he was going over the camera one last time, making sure it still worked unlike the time they hadn't checked it and the battery had died halfway through filming.

"What," he snapped, "I don't need this from you too."

Ben shook his head, "You need to chill dude."

"Jesus fucking christ why is everyone trying to ride my dick today," he snapped, grabbing another bag and heading down the stairs, not bothering to say sorry when he bumped into Richie on his way down the stairs.

*

"So Beverly offered to help us get started on making and selling some merch. I mean it's been a while--"

"Two years," Eddie offered, still sulking. Richie hadn't talked to him once since they'd started the drive to a small town south of Chicago. Hadn't even looked at him. It was disconcerting, Richie being so quiet. He'd just gotten into the back seat without complaint for once, and put his headphones in. He hadn't even kicked Eddie's seat.

"Yeah, and people have been asking for mercy for a long time. We'd better make some before everyone in the shops on etsy make all the money off of selling stuff about our show," Ben continues, one hand on the wheel. This was news to Eddie, he didn't even know any etsy shops sold stuff about them.

"So they are--"

"They're actually pretty good."

"Not the point. This is our show. That's robbery of intellectual property. We should submit a complaint or flag them. They shouldn't be allowed to make money off our ideas," Eddie ranted.

"They're just trying to make a living like we are. And Beverly offered to help us out for free so I think we should all at least think about it. I mean we could start small, just a shirt design or two."

“Okay, but who would design the shirts. None of us are artistic. I can draw stick figures like a fucking five year old. Richie’s drawings are literally just dick’s and no offense but that sketch of Beverly is terrifying.”

Ben’s face went beet red, having tried to hide the sketch from his two very nosy roommates. “I’m sure between the three of us we could come up with something. It doesn’t have to be some great work of art. Like a ghost with a quote or something. I mean there are memes of you two idiots going around of the internet. We’ll think of something.”

“Ugh don’t remind me,” he huffed, looking out at the passing scenery, the fields of wheat and trees, a riot of color, before looking back down at his game of candy crush that Richie made fun of. He was on level 99. “You know people ship us together. Like they have a ship name and everything. It’s so weird.”

“You two literally feel asleep on the same bed together. On camera. That’s probably not helping.”

“Ben! What if the ghost had come back! Do you think I was going to sleep alone? Make it easier for the ghost to sneak up on me! I’ve seen all the horror movies. That’s how you die. That’s how the ghost kills you!” Eddie had heard something. They’d even caught a noise on tape that had freaked out them both out at the time, although later Richie would say it was nothing and he had just been half asleep.

Ben chuckled, shaking his head, “I think its funny.”

“We’re just friends. It wasn’t like a gay thing,” Eddie muttered, shoving his own headphones in, not wanting to talk about this, ignoring the twisting feeling in his gut.

He could almost hear the bullies taunting him again, holding him down as they smeared cheap drugstore lipstick on his face, calling him a fag and gay boy before they got bored and moved on to their next target. It hadn’t help that his only friend was Richie Tozier, who was infamous for showing up to school with his shoes duck taped together, shits threadbare after years of use. He’d never gotten a new backpack after his old one had finally fallen apart.

They'd both gotten jumped after school on their way to the arcade once, their pockets full of quarters they'd been saving up. Belch and Criss had both led the group of boys as they'd held them both down, kicking Eddie until he stopped fighting back, only to then force the boys together.

When they'd finally gone away, Richie hadn't been able to meet Eddie's eyes. The boy hadn't gone to school for a week. And Eddie had been grateful. He wasn't sure he could have looked at Richie and pretended he was all right.

"Can you change the album or something," Ben asked, "I can't listen to Is this It again."

"Sure dude," Eddie said, unplugging his headphones to connect his phone to the aux cord, scrolling until he found his favorite playlist. Four hours of music that Richie had put together when they had moved to Boston six years ago.

His mom had insisted on driving both boys to Boston, not trusting the airplane to be clean enough for delicate Eddie, as if Eddie hadn't figured out in middle school that he wasn't actually sick.

Shaking off the habit was harder said than done.

"You okay back there Richie," Ben asked, clearly bothered more by Richie being quiet than by Richie's usual blabbering.

He didn't look up from his comic book, the latest collection of Saga.

"Richie!"

"Yeah!"

"You okay?"

He grinned, "why wouldn't I be Benny? I'm going to get to watch Eds freak the fuck out at every shadow he calls a ghost."

"Ghosts are real. Just because you don't believe in them doesn't mean they can't hurt you."

"Right well, I'm not taking advice from anyone who still calls their mother, mommy." Richie's tone lacked its usual bite, but Eddie knew from experience that pretending everything was fine was the best way to handle Richie or he'd just clam up.

*

It was past midnight by the time they finally got to the suburb outside of Chicago where the haunted club was located. It was only an hour outside of the city, but it might as well have been an entire world away looking more like farmland than a suburb.

The association that now owned the place had recommended them a few motels around town and they'd be meeting with them tomorrow.

They bot piled into the motel room, Richie taking the sofa bed without question as Ben and Richie carried their things into the room.

"I still feel a bit weird that us," Ben told them, "a bunch of white guys, are covering a haunting with it's origins based on racism in the early 20th century."

"I mean I'm half jewish," Eddie offered. His dad had been, according to his mom, but he didn't know anything about that. His dad had passed away when he'd still been in diapers.

"But not like jewish jewish," Richie called from where he was laying in his boxes on the sofa bed. "Or you would have agreed with my whole-"

"We are not hot boxing a weed menorah! For the last time Richie-"

"It's a genius idea! I can't help having all these great ideas that were not meant for mere mortals," he said, voice going into a cross between the goblin thing from Lord of the Rings, that had put Eddie to sleep, and a deep low voice that might have been Richie's take on a demon.

"That's probably insinuative dude," Ben added.

"Why didn't you ask Stan!"

“Why would I ask Stan?”

He rolled his eyes, turning to Ben, “Well we’ve done this all correctly. Contacted the owners of the place. Asked for a tour and if we could stay there instead of breaking in like the delinquent over there suggested.”

“Not to mention we’re not racist. We just want to talk to ghosts,” Richie yelled.

“That too.”

Ben shrugged, booting up his laptop to talk to Beverly. “I just think we should be careful how we approach this is all.”

“Yeah, yeah, go on and talk to the love of your life now.”

“Ew gross. I don’t need to witness this,” Richie said, pulling a t shirt on and his jeans.

“Heterophobia is real,” they heard Beverly call out from Ben’s computer.

“Hi Beverly.”

“Bye Beverly.”

They ended up walking to the drug store across the street. Richie asked for a pack of cigarettes as Eddie got their usual haul of chips, arizona mango juice, and cheap vodka. Brownies weren’t worth eating unless they were weed brownies, according to Richie.

Eddie could still feel the lingering strain between them, and felt bad. He was sure it was his fault, but he didn’t know what he’d done. And asking Richie anything head on just made things worse. There was nothing Richie hated more than talking about himself.

“Want anything else,” Eddie called out to Richie. They were the only ones in the store aside from the guy at the register who sat, scrolling through his phone.

“Get me some of those cookies and cream chocolates.”

“Those are just sugar. White chocolate is just sugar. It’s a scam.”

“You said if I wanted anything. You don’t have to eat them.”

“Do you know how bad sugar is for you,” Eddie said, grabbing the chocolate and placing the stuff on the counter by Richie as they waited fro the chaser to ring them up. “Do you want to get diabetes and die!”

“Pretty sure we’ve come to a point in time where getting sick doesn’t equal death but okay,” Richie says, opening the chocolates and taking a bit out of it. Chocolate was shaped into bite size pieces for a *reason*.

“Ugh, why do I even bother.”

He knew he’d said something wrong when Richie flicked before responding, “pay the man eddie bear and let’s bounce and see if we catch Ben having video sex with Beverly.”

“Why would you even want to see that?”

“Because Ben would die of embarrassment my dude. It would be hilarious. Live a little.”

They sit on the curb and open the bottle of vodka and cans of juice, alternating between taking sips of each. It felt good, especially in the chilly fall air. Eddie zipped up his jacket to avoid getting a cold. He reached over and zipped up Richie’s, ignoring how close they were.

“Why Eddie, I’m used to having people want to undress me, but this is. . .kinky.”

“Really Richie,” Eddie says, taking another sip of his arizona, and getting up, glad the dark obscured his burning face. It didn’t mean anything. It was just Richie getting under his skin.

“I’m going to go sleep, we’ve got a long night tomorrow.”

“That’s what she said,” Richie grins, entering the room after Eddie.

Ben was still talking to Beverly, so they both ended up sleeping on the couch.

*

The woman that met them outside wore a nice dress with heels. Her skin was a rich dark color, the word ebony came to mind, it just made the string of pearls she wore stand out more. “You must be the youtubers,” she said, “I’m Nia, Nia Hanlon. Pleased to meet you.”

“Can we do that again,” Ben said after shaking her hand, for the cameras. I’d love to get your tour on tape.”

“So where’s the moldy old building,” Richie asked.

Nia laughed, “Oh it’s been restored. It’s now a community center for children in need. Free day care and tutoring for families who normally couldn’t afford it. The family wants to make sure the space is put to good use. It’s run by volunteers like me.”

“Oh thank god,” Eddie says, not feeling the least disappointed that he wouldn’t have to sleep among dust, mold, and god knows what else.

“So should I tell you about the building’s history and the rumored hauntings,” she asked, her perfectly sculpted eyebrow raised, before breaking into a wide smile.

“We’d love to hear more about the history,” Eddie responded.

“My cousin was supposed to meet us here but I guess we’ll get started without him then.” She took a breath before getting into the thick of it. “Among the african americans that came north to escape racism in the south and share-cropping, which was essentially slavery by keeping poor black families in debt, was Dick Hallorann and James Hanlon who would go on to serve in the first world war. After they came back from serving in the first world war, they came back to a backlash of racism aimed at black veterans. So they both decided to make a safe place for black veterans, and black people in general. They opened up a jazz club called The Black Spot.”

“Don’t you just love those racists,” Richie said, shaking his head, “men go out and die for you, but how dare they not be white.”

“Well, she said before continuing, “let’s just say the KKK wasn’t just a problem in the south like many people like to believe. Some on the

worst race riots in history were in Chicago. There was a league of so called white supremacists who were bothered by the Black Spot that by the 1920s had become quite the local hotspot. It was a place where the black people in town could come together and not be bothered by the same racism they had tried to escape in the south only to find that same prejudice in the north. So they burned down the club and many people were caught in the fire and died.

You see, many people believe that the firefighters had been tipped off so they wouldn't intervene. One of the founders, James Hanlon, perished in those flames."

"He's one of the ghosts said to haunt this places," Eddie asks, pointing at the building they had finally arrived at. It didn't seem like the type of place that would be haunted. The two story building was brick faced, painted red and white. The sign outside was small, but clearly labelled the building a community center. The windows were wide, letting in the morning sun.

Eddie could even see the toys and chairs for kids to play with.

"Yes. James Hanlon is said to be heard occasionally by the bar, where he was known to go behind the counter and serve drinks to customers. There have been many visitors who claimed to have heard him throughout the years. There's also a dancer, Rita Henderson, that can be heard all along the place with the sound of an old jazz number playing although no one has been able to tell which record is playing. Might have been by the local band."

"And where would the bar be in current times," Richie asked, trying to sound like a 1920s outlaw.

"Around where we have our small library."

"Have you ever heard anything?"

She shrugged before continuing as she unlocked the door to let them in, "The place was rebuilt by Dick Halloran who was very much of the mind that he wouldn't let the white people win."

"Dick, my man," cried Richie, making Nia laugh.

He felt a shiver run up his spine as Nia led them inside.

"This time The Black Spot was a restaurant frequented by black people, especially after church on Sundays."

"I feel like naming it the same thing is knocking on wood," Eddie said as Richie let out a scream when someone suddenly appeared from the back room. It was a man who looked a lot like Nia, probably the cousin that was also supposed to meet them.

"You're supposed to be the ghost hunter," the man said, eyebrow quirked. He wore jeans and a paisley printed mustard shirt, a scarf around his neck that almost hid his big smile, amusement clearly written in his eyes.

Richie just made lots of affronted noises.

"We're on the restaurant," Nia told him.

"Oh god," the man said before introducing himself, "Sorry I'm late but the traffic from the city was awful. I'm Mike."

Then Nia picked back up, "We'll apparently in the fifties a man by the name of Medgar Jackson looked at a white woman wrong when he was walking in town. Millicent Hale was walking with her friend when and Medgar refused to get off the sidewalk to let them pass. A day later a mob gathered to lynch the man. One of those men was the sheriff of the town, Butch Bowers. They stung him outside of the restaurant, by a tree that has since been cut down, and watched as he suffocated to death. People have claimed to hear him asking for help outside."

"Jesus christ," Eddie said, feeling sick to his stomach. He knew how bad racism had been and was in america, but knowing it was bad and actually hearing and seeing it were two different things.

"You're not getting out of this," Richie said, accusingly. "You're the one trying to prove ghost are real."

"I'm not trying to prove anything. You're the one trying to prove that they're not real. I don't need you to believe me to know they're real. We've been over this. I don't want to die all because you keep

insisting on antagonizing ghosts!"

Mike laughed, "Come on let's go upstairs. My grandfather once said he saw Medgar Jackson hanging from the tree outside. That's why he cut it down."

"So this belongs to your family," Richie said, winking.

Mike just laughed, "yeah, great grandfather founded the place with his friend and it's been in the same families ever since."

"I take it you don't believe in ghosts," Eddie asked.

"Oh I don't," said Mike, "but I'd just rather not mess with anything just in case."

*

They all had lunch after.

Mike took them to his favorite vegan place even as Richie and Ben complained about the lack of steak.

"Can you believe he grew up on a farm raising lambs for the slaughterhouse!"

"Thats the main reason I went vegan," Mike said. He had driven down from the University of Chicago where he was attending grad school for Library and Information. "I kind of fell into it after being in the Harvard library and learning how much work it actually takes to run a library and I don't know, it's hard to describe and such a niche thing most people haven't even heard of it."

"My cousin double majored the overachiever," Nia said, pointing at Mike with her fork, "while I just sort of went into riding. Broke my mother's heart when I didn't go to college right after graduation."

"Really?"

"History and Library and Information," Mike said with a shrug, "it took me a while to figure out what I was doing but I loved history so I started there."

"Eddie switched majors twice," Richie said, wiggling his eyebrows.

"Okay, but at least I didn't almost major in math like a loser. Who the hell majors in math anyway? No one needs that. You've got to graduate high school just to get away from it!"

"Fuck off! You wish you could do math as easily as I can."

"No I fucking don't! No one likes math asshole," he retorted, scowling into his fake fish tacos.

They talked about their job as youtubers and the situations that had gotten them in. "The low point was definitely trying to break into a church at midnight for the vine while drunk," Eddie said with a pointed look at Richie.

Ben snorted, nearly choking on his pressed carrot juice.

"You're like ninety percent of my self control, what did you think was going to happen if we both got drunk!"

"I liked the time I got a free tea at my favorite cafe when the cashier saw I was editing your guys dumb footage," Ben added.

"Not the time we spent the night in jail because Richie tried to get into sealed police records?"

"The amount of times we've spent in jail because of Richie," Ben said, shaking his head, spearing more collard greens with his fork.

"Fuck you guys! These are stories to tell the grandkids when they won't shut the hell up and grow tired of their devices."

"Didn't we end up in the emergency room prom night," Eddie said, looking over at Richie. They'd gone stag together knowing no one would actually go with them. And there was something nice about finishing high school as they'd started, together. Richie had managed to find the most outrageous tux to go in, paisley green with a black tie decorated with jack o lanterns. Eddie had just gone in a navy blue suit his mother had forced him into for church, wearing the christmas tie Richie had gifted him for his birthday. Richie had even gotten him a corsage. Eddie had ignored the little jump his heart had gotten at

the thought, at the implication of a corsage. He knew it was just Richie being Richie, it didn't mean anything.

And Eddie wasn't gay.

"Yeah, all because you hesitated while climbing on a roof."

"I knew I shouldn't have listened to you."

"It would have been really romantic if we had gotten on the roof and star watched."

"Star gazed," corrected Ben.

Eddie shake his head, laughing at the memory, "instead of falling off the roof and nearly dying."

"Told you we'd laugh about it later," Richie said grinning at Eddie.

*

Mike drops them off, waiting for Ben to finish setting up the cameras before following Mike out with the promise of a country line dance. There was going to be cheap beer and more Mike, who was kind of the greatest person they'd all ever met. He was so easy to talk to. Mike really listened and cared and was so easy going.

He didn't even get bothered by all their bickering, already fond of it. Even Ben got sick of them after a few hours of being cooped up with them in a car.

Ben of course wouldn't shut up about Beverly to anyone who would listen, which meant Mike practically knew Beverly by now.

They set up their sleeping bags on the floor of the first floor, by the centers small library.

"I really hope nothing happens," he said towards the camera and at Richie. "None of these ghost are probably too happy. They're probably the vengeful kind that want to like scratch people and scare the shit out of them."

"I feel like ghosts in general are vengeful like no ghost just stick around. All the ghost you hear about had horrible deaths."

"You'd be the ghost that stuck around just because," Eddie said, glaring at Richie who winked with his usual shit eating grin, the one Eddie had come to know and love.

They did another small tour of the building at night. Eddie made Richie walk in front of him as they walked up to the second floor, not willing to risk dying for youtube.

"Stop being such a baby," Richie says, but doesn't pull away from Eddie's hand on his shoulder, grip tight.

"I'm being cautious. Just because you want to die by provoking ghosts and breaking into haunted house down not mean I am willing to die. Do you understand! Stop laughing I'm serious!"

"How could I have forgotten to provoke the ghosts," Richie says in the fakes tone ever, "jazz is dumb and was obviously invented by Ryan Gosling in LaLaLand."

"What part of don't provoke the ghosts did you not understand! What was the point of consulting with a priest if you won't even take the advice!"

"We need to bring the queen of rap, Iggy Azeala, back."

"Shut the fuck-did you hear that," Eddie said, bumping into Richie in his blind panic, ready to book it the hell out of here and sleep in the motel room instead.

"It was just the wind or something," Richie said, pretending he hadn't just jumped at the sound as well, before grinning, "probably."

"I hate you."

"Aw Eds."

After that noise, which Eddie was so going to make Ben replay and amplify because he knew he heard something and there were lots of times the audio caught noises that weren't random, that they were

ghost speaking words, that Eddie himself missed and Richie always tried to explain away by saying it was the wind.

God. A ghost could appear in front of Richie and he'd try to explain it away while running away.

He made them hurry up and finish because he just wanted the night to end. He still wasn't sure why he kept following Richie on his dumb ideas, except he totally did. He'd just about follow Richie anywhere like Richie had followed him to Boston because Richie was the person he was closest to. His best friend and more.

Richie was the first person Eddie wanted to tell things to. Usually he didn't have to tell Richie because he was usually there along with him.

He'd die for Richie Tozier, but Richie wouldn't let him.

After setting the cameras for the night and settling in, feet firmly inside the covers, Eddie finally managed to build up the courage to ask Richie what had been bothering him all week.

"You don't like Stan or anything," he whispered, snuggling further into his blanket. He couldn't risk looking at Richie now.

Silence.

He'd said the wrong thing, again. Richie was supposed to be the trash mouth, but it was always Eddie saying the wrong thing.

"No, what the fuck. It was just a one night stand Eddie," Richie finally whispered back after an eternity. "Why?"

"No reason."

"You gonna pull a Mrs. K on me and convince me I had cancer or something? No one's gonna steal me away from you Eddie bear," Richie said rolling over to Eddie, kicking him in the thigh by accident, before wrapping his arms around Eddie's small frame, "you should know that by now."

"Fuck off," he said, feeling relieved, a weight off his chest, not

meaning a word of it.

“Go to sleep,” Richie whispers gently, “I won’t let the ghosts get you.”

Eddie glanced back at Richie, ignoring how close they were, a breath away, “thought you didn’t believe in ghosts?”

Richie sighed, rolling his eyes, before leaning in and kissing him more gently than Eddie had thought possible coming from Richie “trashmouth” Tozier. To his surprise, or maybe not, he kissed Richie back eagerly, rolling them over so that he was on top of Richie, pinning him down. His heart was beating like crazy in his chest.

“The camera’s still on,” Eddie whispers when they finally break apart for air, both their breaths are ragged.

“I’m sure the fans will be very happy,” Richie says, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Shut the fuck up and kiss me,” he replies, “this wouldn’t even make it past youtube’s censorship. Like if nipples on women won’t what makes you think-“

“Pretty sure that’s instagram but whatever.”

Eddie leans down to kiss him, and shut him up. A win-win scenario if there ever was one.

*

“Finally,” Ben mutters later at three in the morning when he’s up editing the final cut, trying to make their Thursday night deadline.

Notes for the Chapter:

wasn't very happy with how this chapter turned out
but id probably keep editing it forever so i might as
well post it now when im at least somewhat okay
with it.

4. a forgone conclusion

They're both cuddling in bed watching the supernatural pilot, only half paying attention as they make out when Richie, as usual, ruins the mood.

"We should get a bigger bed Eds Keds," he says loudly, as if he could ever be quiet, "I know we're both small guys but still, it's a bit cramped. I told you we should have gotten a king sized bed but you didn't listen." It wouldn't be Richie Tozier if he ever shut up, and Eddie loves him for it.

"We weren't even dating then! Besides did we not compromise on the bunk beds? What were we going to do? Share a bed? Honestly Richie," he says. Eddie pauses for a second muttering his last words out, "and I don't want move too fast."

"I mean," he says laying his head, "we've kinda sort of known each other our whole lives. So like, you could say we've been dating since forever." Richie grins widely, before winking. "I'm sure your mom will understand."

Eddie can feel all the warm and fuzzy and hot feelings going through him grow cold. "Jesus fucking christ," he shouts shoving Richie off the bed, "don't talk about my mom when we're in bed! And we haven't even been on a date yet!"

Richie lays sprawled in the matted carpet, laughing. It's old, but clean. Eddie knows because he hired someone to clean it before they moved in and once a year since. Their landlord was too cheap to change the carpet no matter how much they had ganged up on them, but he did throw in the old vacuum cleaner Ben occasional used, but only in his room, the fucker.

"Then what was prom dumbass."

Eddie responds by grabbing the pillow near him and beating Richie with it, falling to the floor onto of him, "Don't be such a smart ass!"

"You know you love it!"

“Ugh,” grumbles fondly, pillow forgotten as he pins Richie down with his body and kisses him, first on his lips, then trailing down to the spot on Richie’s neck that he *knows* leaves him shaking and needy and he loves the thrill of being the one to get underneath Richie’s skin for once. To have him hot and bothered under him.

“Thought you wanted to take things slow,” Richie whimpers in between kisses and moans.

“Shit the fuck up Tozier!”

“You said shit instead of-“

Richie’s eyes flutter closed as he moans his names, more softly than Eddie ever thought Richie capable off. Richie who hasn’t stopped with the mom jokes or dick jokes since fifth grade, after their puberty class lesson that Eddie hadn’t been allowed to attend since his mom didn’t sign the permission slip.

“I don’t even know if I’m gay,” he admits against the shell of Richie’s ear, rolling off of Richie and slumping against the floor. It’s something that had been needling at him for days. He was an obsessive person, mostly about his health, thanks mom, but he could also be obsessive in general and this had him spiraling. Did this make him gay? Was he bisexual? He had really liked Mya, had thought things had been going well for them. They’d study together, eating the sushi burritos she loved to make, saying they were easy even when he didn’t believe her. She’d dragged him to all sorts of coffee shops and had let Richie hijack their dates taking them to the arcade. She’d been terrible at pac-man, but she’d always have fun. And they’d fucked like too stressed out students that were hot and bothered and god, Eddie had really liked her. He thought she really like him too.

So he had been really surprised when she’d broken up with him right before winter break, with the standard it’s not you, it’s me.

Eddie needed a label to reorient himself, to steady himself and know what everything meant. He wanted to make sense of everything he felt for Richie in more than his love for his friend (boyfriend?) and the urge to kiss him and more. He just wasn’t a person who could just go with the flow, at least not with this. Eddie was just a small ball of

anxiety and stress and the only person who had ever been able to make him stop worrying had been Richie.

Richie is silent, letting him think, for as long as he can. Richie can no more sit still than be silent for long, and sure enough, he sits up, looking over at Eddie. “I don’t think you’re gay. Maybe bi? I could see that,” he says, a slight furrow to his brow, before the serious expression dissolves, “I guess your mother was right after all. I did turn you gay!”

“Richie! I’m serious.”

“I’m not serious. I’m Richie.”

Eddie just glares at him, refusing to take the bait. Ben was probably debating whether or not to tell them to shut up. It was already two in the morning and Eddie had set his alarm to seven, which was looking more and more unlikely.

Richie laughs at his own joke before responding, “well I can’t tell you or solve that for you and you really don’t have to use labels if you’re questioning or what not, but I can take you on a date.”

“If it ends with us in jail I’d rather not.”

“Why do you always assume I’m going to get us in trouble? You’re the one who broke the vending machine at school if you care to remember.”

“That was one time! One time after hundreds of let’s nick some cigarettes and get lung cancer Eddie!”

“Hey, I quit smoking cigarettes,” Richie pouts for about half a second before dissolving into laughter again. “You look so funny when you’re angry.”

Eddie throws the pillow at him and doesn’t even feel bad when it knocks Richie onto the floor. His boyfriend is the worst. And he loves him for it.

*

All of Richie's dates have been disasters. This is a fact known to everybody who knows Richie. Mainly Eddie and Ben, but also the magic club from that time that Richie had taken a magic class that was apparently actually university class that you could take.

Eddie had been so annoyed that Richie had taken it considering it cost money and was dumb as fuck. Also that one lesbian that had caused a punk phase in Richie. He still had a jean jacket with patches all over it that he wore. They'd both been fiends at physics and had done well in school for people who only showed up to their labs.

Eddie had also known this and fumed because who the hell passes classes without showing up.

So, knowing Richie's track record, he spends the day anxious to see what Richie has in store for their date, even though they've been dating for two months, mostly on the road and working editing videos and getting their march set up. They were starting out with two shirt designs.

It had taken all three of them to draw something that wasn't utter garbage, and Beverly had liked it even if Stan's respond was the teeth clenched emoji like the asshole he was, even though he did promise to buy one of each so he really wasn't that bad.

He texted Mike, who Ben had befriended because Ben was a ball of sunshine who made friends wherever he went. He was such a people person who radiated rainbows he had gotten in backstage to multiple shows. Richie had said it was just because no one believed he was really there for his boybands but there because he was a vip or some sort. Either way, they'd met one direction for free so . . . who cares.

Mike had just responded by saying, *wait, you guys weren't dating???* He even adds a bunch of side eye emojis for good measure.

All his friends are useless.

Eddie feels more nervous than he should for this date considering how much he knows Richie and is relieved when Richie finally gets back from whoever he'd gone this morning, it had really only been the morning for them since they'd both woken up past noon.

“Ready for the most memorable night of your life Eddie Bear,” Richie says, walking into their living room that was an ugly couch with a tv proper up on their combined textbooks and game consoles spread about.

“I don’t know,” he says, before breaking out into a grin, “prom’s going to be pretty hard to top. Not to mention when you got us just trapped in a haunted cell for an hour.”

“It was not haunted!”

“So those footsteps we heard was just the wind!”

“Uh yeah,” Richie nods, not willing to concede that he couldn’t explain away the evidence of ghosts they’d gotten with a scientific explanation.

“Inside a building! Yeah right. My ass it was the wind.”

Richie grabs Eddie’s hand and hauls him off the couch, “Okay, okay but lets go.” He’s bouncing off the walls with excitement, or nervousness. It’s always hard to tell with Richie, who loves to cover things up.

They take the T as usual. It could have been any other normal day for them, if not for the fact that their hands were intertwined, and Richie hadn’t let Eddie’s hand go once.

Eddie couldn’t help but glance around every one in a while, convinced that people were staring at them and scared that they would say something even though he knew that this wasn’t their small conservative town and things had changed. People no longer looked the other way when gay kids were bullied, or at least not as much as they did.

He held Richie’s hand tighter.

Once he saw where they got off, he had a good idea about where they were going. He knew Richie and this city too well not to.

“I hate you so much,” he muttered as they made their way to their lane. Eddie forced himself to ignore the lurch in his stomach as he

slid on the bowling shoes that god knows how many people with who knows what diseases had worn. He wasn't twelve years old anymore. He wasn't about to sit on the sidelines and watch others play just because he was scared of germs.

Eddie swallowed and looked up to see what dumb names Richie had chosen for them this time, only to find Richie looking over at him.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," he said, and it didn't feel like a lie, "I'm going to kick your ass."

Richie grinned, before replying in a high pitched english lady accent that was supposed to be Cher from Clueless, "as if!"

"Richard! I swear to god Richie!" Eddie was so close to just throwing the bowling ball at Richie's face if he didn't stop trying to sabotage his turn. He'd yelling things out right as he went to throw the ball, or run up and shove him then running away crackling like the little shit he was.

"That was so bad Eds," Richie said between laughs, holding his hands out to stop Eddie from hitting him.

"Richie! I'm going to kick you out of our room if you don't stop! And you can kiss your demon episode goodbye!"

"Eddie," he whined mockingly, "hate the game not the player."

Eddie went for his glasses, ripping the taped frames off Richie's face and throwing them away. If that's how he wanted to play, then he could play just as dirty too.

"Dude not cool," Richie yelped as he went after this battered frames that he refused to replace because he said they looked cool with all the tape hiding them together. Richie was blind as fuck so Eddie would have plenty of time to fuck up Richie's turn and play his own without interference.

He didn't feel the slightest bit bad as he rolled the ball right into the gutter.

He looked over to see Richie on all fours, searching for his frames and laughed, before rolling a strike for himself. Maybe Richie would finally get new glasses after this.

Ben and him were both certain he would after his glasses had fallen into crack in some haunted house. One of the lens had been so cracked it was impossible to see through, but Richie had just replaced the lens instead of the whole thing.

Eddie went again for Richie, rolling two gutter balls before he came back with a milkshake in hand, his glasses sitting crookedly on his thin nose.

"You proposing an armistice," Eddie asked eying the vanilla milkshake coated with hot fudge, his favorite.

"That's not what an armistice is dumbass. Even I know that," Richie said, rolling his eyes, but handed the milkshake over to him all the same.

He'd only gotten one, hadn't even bothered to get two straws.

"Do you know how many germs are in a person's mouth! That's why you're not supposed to share drinks! It's unsanitary Richie!"

"Calm your tits babe," Richie said, slouching in his seat, "that's not what you said last night."

Eddie snorted, sitting down next to Richie and taking a large sip from his milkshake, before leaning over to kiss Richie, running his free hand through his soft dark curls. Eddie had grown to love Richie's long and unkempt hair, loved running his hands through the curls.

"Good milkshake huh," Richie said trying for nonchalant, but sounding flustered anyway, red creating up his alabaster skin.

"Good enough too share a bed with," his replied easily, laughing at Richie's bugged eyed expression before he got up and kicked the grimy shoes off. "Told you I'd kick your ass at bowling."

“Only because I’m a good boyfriend who let you Eddiebeth.”

Richie never could let anyone else have the last word.

Notes for the Chapter:

short and sweet. this chapter /really/ didnt want to happen but it eventually came out

5. Supernatural: The Demon of Neibolt House

“I thought you said you’d called,” Eddie hisses as Richie climbs the gate that encloses what he’s referring to as the demon building. He hates these the most. Only Richie would think fucking around with demonic entities would be a fun idea.

“I did,” Richie easily replies with the shit eating grin that says he thinks he’s being clever, “but no one answered.”

Beverly laughs even as he throws her a dirty look.

He really wishes he had stayed back at the nice bed and breakfast with the Stan and Mike. They’re probably flipping through the channels, or taking advantage of HBO and all the premium channels. Eddie really wishes that was him right now.

“I swear to god if we end up spending the night in jail again-“

“Relax babe,” Richie replies, taking the camera bag from Ben so he can hop over to. “You have you’re holy water gun on you don’t you?”

“I’m going to end up using it on you if you don’t shut the fuck up!”

From her perch on top of the fence, Beverly laughs wild loud laugh, throwing her head back. She’d make a great peter pan in a play, she even has the red hair down,

“That’s right babe, the only demon here is me.”

Eddie scoffs in outrage and climbs the fence too quickly, he’ll have scares in the morning.

“What I want to know is why the family’s kept the house if there’s a demon here?”

“Oh god,” Richie mutters, looking at Beverly, “Don’t tell me you believe in demons too Molly Ringwald?”

“Oh fuck off Harry Potter,” she says throwing him the middle finger. So far they’ve gone through all the eighties John Hughes movies as

they've both smoked their way through the bag of weed Richie had brought with him.

Eddie doesn't care about the Breakfast Club if he's being honest.

"Okay then let's hurry up before we get caught then," Ben says, "then we can bounce."

"Who the fuck is going to come out here at this time of night? We're in upstate New York. There's no one around. We're not going to get caught."

Both he and Ben say, "that's what you always say," at the same time.

Richie only scoffs, affronted.

"Okay how about we film the intro outside and then we'll see if we can break in," Ben says taking out the lights so the camera can actually see more than just the vague outlines of him and Richie.

"That's hot," Beverly tells Ben as she zips up her faux fur jacket. Richie had put it on earlier and gone about pretending to be a Kardashian. It had been a pretty good impression by Richie's standards, and Eddie had laughed despite how annoyed he was.

"Ben is the best type of criminal because no one expects this chubby nice guy to be out here," Richie say, hugging Ben from behind and trying to carry him despite being half a head shorter than him.

"Careful Eddie," Beverly smirks, "Ben might just steal your boyfriend."

"As if," he says taking out the rosary he'd bought in preparation for their latest dumb adventure that was likely to get them killed, and hanging it around his neck. It was cheap, being made of plastic. He'd almost splurged on a sliver rosary, but then he'd learned it being a rosary was what counted, even going so fas as to get it blessed by a priest.

They set up in front of the building, which has ivy growing along the steps leading up to the house. Eddie had expected it too be in worse shape than it was. The steps were crumbling and the grounds hadn't

been up kept, covered in rotting leaves and weeds along with trash from trespassers, but the building itself was mostly intact.

Some of the windows were boarded up and the door had been vandalized with a pentagram and lots of dicks. A heavy chain graced the door handles, probably to keep people like them out.

Beverly threw them the shirts she'd helped them design and set up to sell. One had a ghost tapping Richie on the back with the slogan "beep beep Richie," which Eddie had brought back from their childhood to get around youtube's rules against found language.

The other had Eddie holding a slasher knife above Richie with the slogan, "Don't call me Eds."

Richie had complained about him getting the short end of the stick on both of the designs. "Sure okay, trash the trash mouth. I don't even believe in ghosts."

The pulled the shirts over their jackets. It was too cold to just wear the shirts. It wouldn't be long now before the first snowfall of the year. Eddie had bought along the scarf Ben had given him for his last birthday, pulled tight around his neck. He wasn't going to face a demon only to catch a cold after.

"Okay guys," Ben said after testing out the camera and lighting.

"Do your thing lovebirds?"

"Do I look like you fucking brother," Eddie hissed before the red light went on.

"So here we are," he started, "ready to face a demon all for youtube."

"You don't have to look so happy about it."

"Why would I be happy about any of this! It's a demon Richie! A demon, the drag you to hell and kill you type. There's nothing to be happy about."

"You do know that the exorcist if just a movie right," Richie said, shit eating grin in place. He hated how calm he was when Eddie was

three-seconds and an unknown noise from bolting.

“Let’s just get this over with,” he sighs, “On this episode we visit the Neibolt house-“

“More like mansion,” Richie scoffs.

“Don’t interrupt me,” he snaps, taking a breath before continuing. “As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted,” daring Richie to say anything, “we will visit the Neibolt house as part of our ongoing investigation into the question are demons real. It was built in 1797 by Richard Debrough after the revolutionary war. It was originally meant to be built earlier, but when the war broke off the house had to be postponed. The Denbroughs are and were a wealth New York family who mostly dealt in shipping before-“

“Oh my go I’m so bored,” Riche said, interrupting yet again, “just get to the good parts.”

“If the demon doesn’t kill you,” he yells, “I’m going to kill you myself.”

“Oh, true crime and supernatural episodes are having a cross over.”

“The Neibolt house is also the supposed site of a demon haunting. Many servants starting in the late 1800s have claimed to see and hear a child with paper white skin and ginger hair playing around the house. One family member, Jonathan William Denbrough, said that he had an imaginary friend growing up who matches the description of the child seen by maids. He also said that the boy called himself Robert Gray. Now there are no records of any child here or nearby having ever been called Robert Gray.”

“Okay but we also know that back in *ye olden days*,” Richie comments in an atrocious english accent, “everyone was terrible at keeping records. I mean that’s why there’s so many unsolved murders and stuff.”

“Well demons like to appear as people and lull people into a false sense of security to get them to open up.”

“Where are you getting this information,” Richie snorts, “I feel like

your just making up demon rules, so jot that down.”

“Um, sure Jan.”

Ben motions for them to walk slowly up to the steps and they do, his obedient ducklings.

“In the early 1900s things got so bad that Zackary Richard Debrough the third, and his wife Elisabeth moved out after their daughter was scratched up while taking a bath, but there was no explanation for the snatches other than the girl saying that Robert got angry when she wouldn’t follow him out to play without asking her mom first. There’s also cases of pets being found dead in the rooms and a child laughing. A priest was called in who supposedly got rid of the demon and the family moved back in. Later that year, William Debrough would fall out a window and break his neck. No one ever figured out how he managed to open the window.”

“Safety wasn’t a thing that existed either before building codes,” Richie added, “it was just do your own thing. Did you even pay attention during history?”

“They were rich Richie, they could afford safety. This wasn’t some factory in the industrial revolution.”

Brow furrowed and skepticism clear in his eyes, Richie added, “I’m just saying, they probably left that kid alone and he was like I’m going to jump down. Y’know, dumb kid stuff.”

Eddie rolls his eyes. A demon could drag Richie across a room and he’d write it off as the wind after he was done screaming and trying to save face.

“The final straw that caused the home to be abandoned was the disappearance of George Zackary Denbrough in 1923. He was out playing with his siblings in the rain and he went to retrieve a ball and was never seen again. The searched all the grounds and finally found the body, bite marks that didn’t match any animal in the area, in the old well behind the house,” Eddie said as they approached the very well.

With a wicked smile, Richie started, “You threw a child in a well? That’s low son, even for a demon. Couldn’t eat the whole body? Had to leave some of it behind? What kind of weak ass demon are you?”

“Stop it. Just stop it before we get killed,” Eddie said staying behind Richie as he peered down the well.

“Take a bite out of me big boy!”

“Oh my fucking god,” he hissed, grabbing Richie by the sweater and dragging him away.

Turning to smile reassuringly and a tad too smugly, Richie told him, “no demons here.”

“You are that idiot white guy who decides to provoke the demon in all the movies. You know what happens to that guy? Do you! He dies.”

Richie shrugs, flicking Eddie’s nose, “but those are just movies Eddiekins.” He smacks his hand away. There was no way that Richie couldn’t feel the same chill in his bones, a primal sense from before people were more than cavemen that there was something here that was wrong, that there was something dangerous in this place.

“We were supposed to have permission but someone,” he said glaring at Richie, “didn’t get it so now we have to find another way in.”

“Hey, I tried therefore I shouldn’t be blamed. Besides,” he said, wiggling his thick eyebrows above his thick glasses, “it’s not breaking in if it’s open.”

“That would never hold up in court.”

“You sound like Stan.”

“I’m just saying. It wouldn’t hold up in court,” Eddie replies in outrage. He hated how easy it was for Richie and Stan to sleep together and then act like it hadn’t been a big deal. Eddie had never been able to do anything like that. Sensitive, his mother had called him.

It had gotten him a lot of dates in college even if he ended up being friends with most of them.

It had also been one of the reasons he had been bullied so badly in school.

They went around trying the doors and windows. Beverly was careful to stay out of frame, testing possible entrances along with them. If it took too long, Ben could always edit out the unnecessary parts.

“I’ll hoist you up and we can try the second floor windows,” Richie offered.

“Oh hell no! I’m not going to break another bone because of your hair brained schemes. First it was that swing that snapped and my arm broke.”

“It wasn’t broken,” Richie protested, “just twisted. And I fixed it.”

“I told you not too. Lots of wounds are aggravated by people who are just trying to help but aren’t trained. Why do you think you’re not supposed to move people until the paramedics get there.”

“I love it when you talk medical to me.”

“Oh fuck off,” he said as he heard Beverly call out to them.

“There’s a door open out back,” she told them, “so someone’s probably losing their job, or at least getting a stern talking too.”

“Or it was the demon,” Richie says, lifting Eddie up even as he yelps.

“Put me down asshole.”

“Better get your holy water ready.”

Going limp against Richie, becoming deadweight, he snaps back, “you’re going to wish you had some.”

“Here we come demon,” Richie yells marching in, one of his arms fist pumping like an idiot.

“I hate how much fun you’re having with this. I really do.”

“Oh worm,” a voice calls out from inside and Richie’s eyes go impossibly wide as he and Eddie look at each other before turning and running for it. Richie’s brave demeanor evaporates as he screams while running out. Eddie holds up the cross from the rosary with a shaking hands, closing his eyes.

He opens his eyes when he hears laughter only to see Beverly and an unknown man laughing. Man is being generous, the guy can’t be more than twenty although Eddie knows what it’s like to have a baby face and be carded even at twenty-five.

The kid’s whole face is lit up in amusement, grinning as he looks at Eddie.

“I found him while looking for a way in,” Beverly shrugs, as Richie peeks back in.

“I can’t believe you were ready to leave me behind to die,” Eddie accuses.

“Babe, no one would kill you, you’re too adorable. Me,” he says, shaking his head, “I wouldn’t be able to shut up and I’d end up in a dumpster.”

“You fucking dumbass,” he says, lowering the cross, “I hope you enjoy sleeping on the grimy carpet tonight.”

“Oh someone’s in the dog house,” the kid says, whistling.

“Who are you exactly,” Eddie asks.

“I’m George Zachary Denbrough the fourth,” he says rolling his eyes at his own name, “but everyone just calls me Georgie.”

“And what the fuck are you doing giving people heart attacks at this hour young man,” Richie says in a shrill voice that might have been an attempt at Eddie’s own mother’s voice.

“Oh,” he says, sheepishly, “getting some wine from the wine cellar. It’s still down here because there’s no better place to put it. Love your

videos by the way. Very funny.”

“Thanks,” Richie says.

“I heard you guys outside and couldn’t resist.”

“We could have been axe murderers,” Eddie scolds.

Georgie crinkles his nose, “you sound like my brother. He’s such a hypocrite though. He literally would run away all the time when we were younger but its all can’t go outside in the rain without all your gear or you’ll get a cold.”

“I dig you kid,” Beverly said, smiling wide, “you’ve got moxie.”

“This isn’t a Wes Anderson film,” Richie snapped.

Beverly responded ever so sweetly, “obviously not or you wouldn’t be wearing that windbreaker,” before they both burst out laughing.

“So I take it you’re cool with us being here,” Ben asked.

“Well I am, and I guess what my brother doesn’t know won’t hurt him,” Georgie shrugged. “He’s still weird about this whole place even though it’s he’s as soon as dad dies. We both used to see Robert, but I guess It fixated on him more because Bill went mouthing off to mom even when Robert told him not too and he ended up in therapy for years.”

“Not you too,” Richie groaned.

Georgie gave him an odd look, “you should meet my brother. Then you’ll see.”

With that ominous sentence they continued filming, Georgie telling them which rooms were more active and Eddie had to endure being locked in the basement for three minutes which had him biting his nails from the anxiety.

When they were done, Georgie locked the door behind them. It was nearly four in the morning by the time they were done.

They promised to meet up and talk more in the morning, after Georgie gave them the name of a good brunch place in town by where they were staying.

Mike and Stan were already sleep and they were too tired to stay awake anyway. Eddie curled up under the covers even as Richie kicked him with his cold feet and called him a blanket hog.

*

“That rich little shit better be buying,” Richie grumbled, annoyed at how much fun they were poking at him after last night’s session.

“It’s okay dude,” Beverly says with a smirk, “You cans till cling to your science if you want.”

Stan rolled his eyes, taking Richie’s side for once, “well it wasn’t a demon. It did end up being a person so this isn’t really proof of anything other than how much a a baby Richie is.”

“You’re supposed to be on my side!”

Stan merely raised a well groomed eyebrows as Mike howled with laughter.

They easily found the restaurant Georgie had told them about. The menu didn’t have any prices and the place was too swanky not to be expensive. They were in the nice part of upstate New York after all.

Georgie was already there sitting at a large booth along with a man who could only be his brother. They both had the same auburn hair and twinkle in their eyes. They both had the same smile that was as close too as a Gatsby smile as Eddie had ever seen.

Stan clearly agreed because his cheeks turned pink as Beverly elbowed him.

If Eddie was being honest, Georgie’s brother was the hotter sibling, his clear blue eyes open and kind.

He looked like the all american dream.

“This is Bill, or William Jonathan Denbrough the second if you’re our mother.”

“Georgie,” Bill groaned, but there was only fondness in his features.

Georgie scooted over so they could all slide in. “He’s in a bad mood because I stole wine last night.”

“That’s not it at all. I told you not to go there alone.”

Georgie shrugged, “they have a killer stuffed french toast thing. And the frittata is to die for.”

“He woke me up at f-four and had me watch all of your videos,” Bill said, looking at all of them, his tone open and inviting as if they were all old friends. “They almost made me forget that you were trespassing.”

Oh shit.

But then he smiles, chuckling, “I’d really rather not have p-peo-people come by. The local kids are bad enough but, you could have juh-just asked.”

“Told you,” Eddie glares at Richie. The stutter might have annoyed some people, but it was just endearing too Eddie.

“I tried.”

“Sure you did,” Eddie says kicking Richie’s shin. He wants Richie to behave for once. He wants Bill too like him.

Bill doesn’t seem bothered by their outburst, more amused than anything.

“So what’s with the stutter? Rich kid like you doesn’t have money for speech therapy?”

“Richie,” they all groaned.

Mike’s already apologizing for Richie even as Richie continues, “What! You know you were all thinking it!”

“S-So it’s not just an act,” Bill says, sipping his drink. “Let’s eat first.”

“He’s really that annoying all the time,” Stan tells Bill.

“Oh I like you,” Richie tells Bill.

They all order, getting drinks as well. They have a couple more days here before they’re all leaving back to their respective parts of the country. Even though it was work, Beverly and Ben had planned a mini vacation for them, seeing as they wouldn’t have time later until next year.

Soon they’re all talking like they’ve known each other their whole lives. Bill eggs Richie on and knows just the right thing to say to keep the conversation going. Georgie turns out to be here on break from college, “freshman year at NYU bitch,” while Bill’s here on some family business, “paper-w-wuh-work’s a bitch.”

He’s an artist, drawing a quick portrait of Mike on a napkins that’s better than anything any of them could have done if they had days. “I’ve mostly been bee-being lazy in India rather than doing anything,” he admits.

“Which dad’s pissed about,” Georgie adds.

“Not like anyone in this f-f-family has worked in generations,” Bill mutters.

The food is just as good as Georgie has said it would be and they spend a good three hours just getting their drink refilled as they all talk and exchange stories. Stan’s are surprisingly hilarious once he starts recounting the times he had to survive magpies in Australia during his year abroad. “I never thought a bird could be that evil.” He’d had to wear a helmet and run for it any time he’d been outside.

“Birds are all evil man,” Bill replies, “Alfred Hitchcock knew that.”

“Right! Thank you,” Richie yells, making people glare at him. Beverly snorts, covering his mouth with her hand.

Stan has been flirting with Bill throughout the whole brunch. Even Eddie could see that. The only person who seems unaware of that is

Bill, much to Stan's annoyance. Georgie and Beverly keep exchanging faces as they look on at their brothers.

They all tumble out into the street, having forgotten how cold the day was despite the sun shining, and not having noticed when Bill had payed for all of them.

"You can't-", Mike started to protest, "let me pay you back."

"Oh he can," Richie said, fluttering his eyelashes, "I've always wanted a sugar daddy." Eddie shoved him, nearly toppling them both, and Bill just laughed at his antics, going along with Richie.

"To who do I sign the check," he said winking at Richie who over exaggeratedly fawned, expecting someone to catch him, but Stan stepped back, letting him fall on his ass.

They all laughed.

"The time," Georgie suddenly said, looking at Bill.

"Ss-Sh-Shit," he said, "Audra's going to kill me."

"I know," Georgie said wickedly, before looking at them. "Come over later and we can talk more," Georgie told them, "We'll pile Billy full of alcohol and get him to talk."

"We will not do that," Bill protested.

"Maybe he'll even show you his scars."

"G-guh-georgie!"

"I'll text you guys the address," he called out as his brother pulled him along, smacking his arm, "Richie has my number so—"

And then they were gone.

"We are definitely getting that right," Ben asked Richie and Eddie knowing full well that they had already made up their minds to go. Too curious for their own good. Eddie would have liked to blame Richie for all they got up to in their youth, but Eddie knew that he

got a secret thrill out of doing things he knew his mother would disapprove of.

“Fuck yeah,” Richie whopped, “except let’s leave Stan behind or he might cream his pants.”

“Sounds more your style Richard,” Stan smirked, “I feel bad for Eddie.”

*

Stan wanted to dislike Audra Philips, he really did. But she was hard to dislike, all wit and sharp smiles. She was also as beautiful as Bill was, but better dressed in black cigarette pants and a red cashmere sweater. Her hair was as long as Beverly’s was short, thick and dark, which she wore loose down her back. Skin a natural tan that couldn’t be replicated by tanning under the sun, rich and dark and a warmth in her eyes to match Bill.

He really wanted to hate her, but when he went on about his birds she listened with interest. Stan really wanted to hate her, but he couldn’t.

True to his word Georgie had been attempting to lie his brother with the same wine he’d taken out of their abandoned mansion. Stan couldn’t fathom having enough money to just have a mansion lying around.

But when he entered their home, their actual home in town, he felt the same familiar emptiness that Stan always felt in his parents home. The Denbrough’s house was clean, clinically so, betraying no warmth or sign of actual people living here.

“Are we sure we’re not inviting the demon by drinking this wine,” Eddie said skeptically even as Richie threw back his own glass like it was a shot, coughing and choking as it went down.

Bill laughed, flushed red from the wine, “No, it’s tied to that old place. Can’t leave. Thank g-god.”

“I liked Robert,” Georgie protested.

Stan feels himself blush when Audra catches him looking at Bill. They had met while Bill had been studying art at Goldsmiths in London. Audra had been studying history of art at King's College and they'd met at a party and he'd followed her back home to Udaipur. But she just smiled. He knew she knew. Stan just wished she'd say something.

He hated confrontation but he also hated these passive aggressive glances. He took a deep breathe, remembering what his therapist had always told him about making problems bigger than they were by over thinking. He counted to five and let out a breathe.

"I know you did," Bill says, as gentle as he can through the haze of the wine.

"Show them," Georgie nudged Bill's shoulder.

He pouted and Stan wondered if anyone had ever said no to Bill Denbrough. He probably didn't even know what he was doing. Bill wasn't like that. He was one of those unfairly attractive people that went around thinking they weren't attractive.

"Come on," Georgie said, "show them."

"Yuh-you are way to into this," Bill said, pulling the collar of his shirt down and exposing the smooth pale skin beneath, stopping when he revealed the scars that ran over his upper left chest. The worst part was that Stan could tell they weren't random, the scars looped in unfamiliar runes.

"Holy shit," Richie yelled, and for once Stan had to agree with him.

Bill was clearly uncomfortable with showing them because as soon as he knew they'd all seen he'd fixed his shirt and taken a long gulp of wine, before saying anything, "I dr-dreamed of Robert Gray once, must have been ten or eleven. I don't remember wuh-what happened but w-wh-when I woke up I was bleeding. I juh-just remember promising not to say anything or bad things would h-ha-happen. And f-f-for a time it was fine. Robert was fine. Sure, he'd get into tantrums and break things and my puh-parents would blame me, but he-he wasn't bad. He'd be fine with rabbits and cats or even raw

meat,” Bill took another sip before continuing on.

Stan couldn’t help but shudder, even if demons weren’t real, it had been real enough to Bill. He couldn’t stop seeing those marks. Ben looked sick to his stomach, clutching Beverly’s hand like a life preserver. Eddie was half hidden behind Richie, peaking from behind his hand.

The only ones who seemed fine were Georgie and Audra who must have heard this before. She rubbed Bill’s back as he continued after emptying his wine glass.

“But then he s-started on about the local kids and I coul-lle-could-n’t-I had to do someth-thing so I told my dad and he did nothing so I went to my teacher and I spent the next five years in an instit-t-tution.”

No one knew what to say, so no one said anything. Stan remembered the horror of finding gay conversion camp flyers in his house one, right under his dad’s paperwork. He’d gotten a girlfriend soon after even as Beverly had said that she’d never let him be sent away, that she’d run away with him if it came to that.

Stan didn’t hate his dad. Donald Uris was a good man who only wanted what was best for his kids, but sometimes what he thought what was best for them wasn’t right. He had been hard and cold throughout Stan’s childhood, surprising Stan when he’d taken in Beverly, but then that was the only way he knew how to be a father. It didn’t excuse him, but Stan couldn’t hate him for trying to be as good of a father as he could.

He’d been so scared to let his father know he wanted to be an ornithologist and not go into finance, having plan b and c and d just in case his father decided not to pay for his college tuition, but the man has simply said, “if you think that’s best Stanley.”

His mother had more than made up for his father’s distance in warm nurturing love, but Stan hoped that one day he and his father could talk, really talk.

“Didn’t you say you got the new Super Mario game,” Audra pointedly asked Georgie.

“It’s Super Mario Odyssey Audra,” Georgie whined, “get it right.”

“Richie’s going to destroy you all,” Eddie said, “he once spent a whole month straight playing Black Ops.”

“I love how you say that like it’s a good thing,” Stan snorted.

Mike laughed before adding, “you need to go back to the classics, Pac Man and Atari.”

“Right,” Beverly said, high giving Mike as Georgie set up the Wii and they all started to play.

Georgie destroyed them all, probably because he was the most sober, having had some wine despite Bill’s protests. Audra and Richie were neck in neck, causing Richie too loudly exclaim “what the fuck,” multiple times.

They eventually switch games and Richie and Beverly teamed up to throw bananas and wreak everyone in racing over winning. Mike was surprisingly good at the mini games, winning Georgie some special mushroom.

Stan was lost, having never really gotten into video games, but giving in when Bill asked him to play with them, eyes wide and pleading until he relented.

He didn’t regret it as Bill showed him how to play. It gave him an excuse to be close to Bill. He’d never really felt anything like what he felt for Bill, not for anyone else, and he knew he had only just met the man, but he heart fluttered whenever Bill so much as looked at him.

His cheeks burning when Audra would glance at them knowingly like he wasn’t flirting with her boyfriend. He would have been mad, but Bill was oblivious and Stan felt with glad and hurt and he had no clue what they were playing at.

Eddie and Richie disappeared after a while, presumably to go have sex back in their room.

Beverly was sitting in Ben’s lap, intent on beating Georgie just once,

while Mike and Ben chatted about some obscure event in history that couldn't be proven or disproven.

Stan got up to go get some water, Bill following, "I know we have some chips around here somew-wuh-where. You must think I'm an awful host," he had said, much too close to Stan.

He waited by the center island as Bill hunted around for the chips feeling as awkward and out of place as ever. It was supposed to be a phase according to his mom, but Stan suspected that he would just be awkward for his whole life.

"You d-don't have too do that," Bill said, catching Stan starting to organize the cupboards. It helped the anxious feeling in his mind that wanted to send him screaming. "OCD," he asked takes Stan's hands gently in his own. Bill's skin was dry, he distantly noted.

"Yes," Stan said, sounding sharper than he meant to.

"Can I do anything to help you feel more comf-f-ff-alright," he asked so earnestly Stan was tempted to hit him. Didn't Bill know what he was doing to Stan? He probably wasn't even the slightest bit gay with his luck.

"I-uh," his brain had stopped working, short circuiting at being so close to Bill he could feel the warmth and scent of fresh soil and cotton.

"Oh just kiss already," Audra said leaning against the doorway with a glass of wine in hand, her dark eyes betraying nothing.

Bill looked from Audra to Stan, unsure, a deer caught in headlights.

So Stan kissed him, chastely, waiting for Bill to respond, wanting him to. And he did, lips slightly chap from the wind, warm, and tasting bitter fro the wine they'd both been drinking.

Audra had moved closer, looking at both of them.

"I don't know what you're playing at but-," Stan hissed, feeling hurt and used, mind catching up to his actions.

She shook her head, putting her glass of wine down. “You like Bill. Bill likes you. We could both like each other, given time, but,” she stated, pausing, looking at Bill, continuing when she found what she was looking for in his gaze. He wanted that, he thought with a jealous pang, he wanted to be able to look at someone and be so in tune with them, he wouldn’t need words. “Let’s not think about that yet,” she told Stan, “we can discuss this and talk about it all later or tomorrow, just not now. Right now let’s just do what we feel like doing,” she offered, raising a brow, before pressing a kiss on the corner of Stan’s lips. She tasted sweet despite all the wine they’d had.

“Okay,” Stan found himself saying. He wanted this. He wanted to lose himself in them and this just this once. Justt this once, he wouldn’t over think things.

“D-don’t I get a say in this,” Bill asked, jeans already tenting up, half hard at the thought of Audra and Stan alone.

“No,” they both responded padding upstairs to the room they’d been using while here.

Bill followed them eagerly.

Notes for the Chapter:

whether robert gray (pennywise) is real in this universe or not is up to the reader. bill and georgie could have just been imagining things or there is a demon haunting their childhood home.

audra phillips in this universe is half english half indian bc its my fic and i can do what i want.